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ABSTRACT

Presented in this paper is a multicultural curriculum design with an underlying conceptual understanding which takes into account the commonalities found among the experiences of various ethnic groups. A common framework to be used for each ethnic group permits the teacher to generalize the experiences of the different ethnic gropus. The model for each culture proceeds as follows: 1) relevant traits of the original culture are listed; 2) a time frame is added starting with the group's arrival in the United States; and (3) ending with the present and intervals along the time line, each ethnic trait is assessed for extinction, degree of modification, or continuation. A completed model shows a historical summary of an immigrant group's degree of loss or retention of their original culture. This conceptual/approach can be modified within the context of the discipline being studied, and selection and/or revision of materials will depend upon the grade level of students. (Author/GPM)

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A Curriculum Design for the Study of Ethnic Survivals

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The need for a multiethnic approach to curriculum development has been advocated by a number of authors who feel this approach reflects the heterogeneity found in the United States. A product of this multiethnic curriculum is a student who has developed "ethnic literacy."[1] This concept entails the recognition that the United States is an ethnically pluralistic society and all students need to understand cultural differences to be able to operate in various cultural settings.

In order for a multiethnic curricular approach to succeed in American public schools it must have an adequate theoretical base. Curriculum guidelines for multiethnic education have been developed and disseminated by the National Council for the Social Studies to assist in this task.[2]

Teachers who include ethnic context in their courses may face a number of problems in trying to convey this material. Some teachers use the method of having units or courses on specific ethnic groups, (i.e. Black and Native Americans). Other instructors try to incorporate multiethnic content within a traditional subject like United States history.

[1] James A. Banks, "Teaching for Ethnic Literacy: A Comparative Approach," Social Education (Dec. 1973), p. 741.

[2] National Council for the Social Studies Task Force. Curriculum Guidelines for Multiethnic Education. Washington D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1976.

In either case, it would be easy for some students to view the roles of various ethnic groups as disjointed. Furthermore, only the more able students would be able to understand, without further assistance, generalizations needed to comprehend the commonalities and differences found among the experiences of many ethnic groups.

Cortés has noted that, "Often there is little or no effort to interrelate the experiences of various ethnic groups. The ghettoization of the teaching about ethnic groups impedes the development of an understanding of these groups and their experiences."[3] There is significant agreement among scholars in the field of multiethnic education on the need for unifying conceptual approaches.

Gay suggests that a thematic approach could be used to study the experiences of ethnic groups from the perspectives of a variety of disciplines.[4] When a subject as diverse as ethnicity is studied, it is necessary to have a common departure point from which the analysis of ethnic groups will proceed. Without this focal point, ethnicity quickly takes a mosaic-like appearance. If ethnicity is to be an integral part of the curriculum, this problem must be avoided.

[3] Carlos Cortés, Understanding You and Them: Tips for Teaching About Ethnicity. Boulder, Colorado; Social Science Educational Consortium, 1976, p. 8.

[4] Geneva Gay, "Organizing and Planning a Culturally Pluralistic Curriculum", Educational Leadership. December 1975, p. 181.

Components of the Design

The purpose of this design is to provide a conceptual framework for: (1) organizing ethnic content and (2) comparing and analyzing ethnic group experiences.

The conceptual framework that organizes this design is all ethnic groups have an original culture which is brought to the country of immigration and this original culture is retained or absorbed at different rates. What factors account for these differences? The length of stay in the new nation is an important factor but does not explain all of the differences.

In order to examine the survival, modification or extinction of an ethnic group's original culture, the design contains the following components:

1. Definition of an ethnic group's original culture
2. Choice of cultural characteristics to be examined
3. A time frame indicating the presence of the group
4. Experiences which modified or stopped the practice of one or more cultural characteristics
5. Level of surviving original culture.

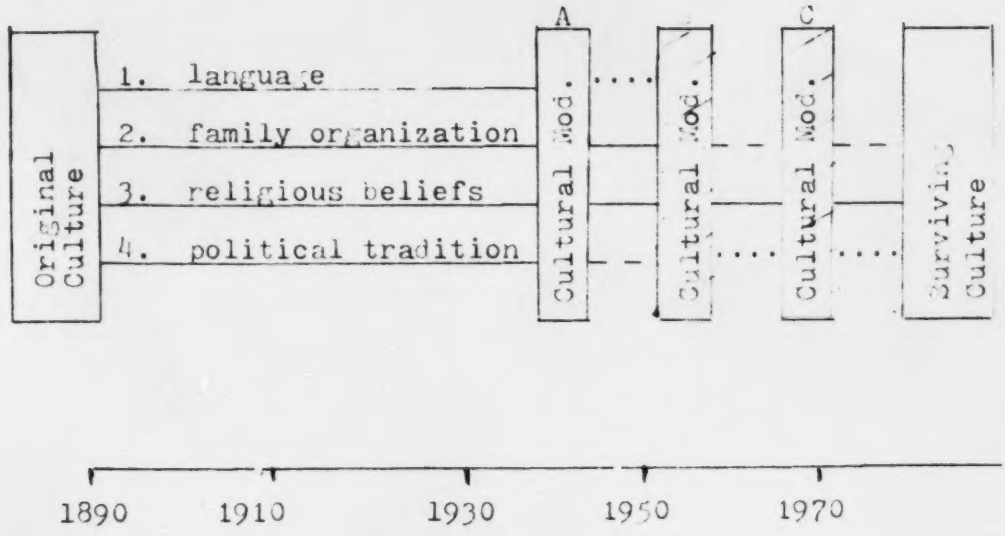
Application of the Design

Before students reach this stage they must be familiar with each of the organizing components previously stated.

This concentration on original culture may at first appear limited in scope. Yet in order to effectively

utilize this design, the student would have to be acquainted with the history of the group being analyzed. Depending on which traits are selected, elements of anthropology, sociology, literature, political science, music as well as other disciplines may have to be examined by the user. While following the trail of what happened to original culture, the student must become familiar with areas that stem far beyond original cultural components.

The graphic depiction of the design that follows has four cultural characteristics to be examined from an ethnic group that immigrated shortly before the turn of this century. In the documentation procedure below the design, students would research information that would substantiate each element of original culture (OC), as well as experiences faced by the group that modified one or more cultural characteristics.



Legend

Trait Extinction:

Slight Trait Modification:

Trait Continuation:

Significant Trait Modification:

Ongoing Modifier:

Documentation for Cultural Modifiers

OC 1:	A 1:	B 1:	C 1:	SC 1:
OC 2:	A 2:	B 2:	C 2:	SC 2:
OC 3:	A 3:	B 3:	C 3:	SC 3:
OC 4:	A 4:	B 4:	C 4:	SC 4:

After this design is used by students on a variety of groups, patterns of similarities would begin to appear. These patterns should lead to generalizations and concept formation. Also, those experiences which are unique to particular groups would stand out because of a lack of precedent. Activities could then be designed by instrutors to capitalize on the comparative approach generated by the design.

While the main application of the design is the tracing of the original culture of an ethnic group in the United States, the design could also be applicable to other nations. A further application could be the analysis and comparison of an ethnic group in two or more nations. The retention of original culture among Italian Americans contrasted with that of Italian Brazilians could be an example of the international dimensions of the design.

Documentation of the Design

The level of the design may be significantly altered according to the complexity of materials being used in the documentation.

Instructors using the design with students capable of independent library research could assist students by providing them with a bibliography of sources and pertinent pages which relate to the original culture of the ethnic

group being studied.

Another method to make the documentation of the design less complex is to have the instructor select passages and rewrite them, where necessary, to lower the reading level. The revised passages may then be fitted to the design as a class activity or by individual students. The more difficult task of selecting germane passages is thus avoided and students may concentrate solely on where the information is most likely to fit the design.

Conclusion

The selection of an ethnic group's cultural characteristics will determine the applicability of the design to particular disciplines. Cultural factors could be selected which look at an ethnic group from literature and music perspectives or from political and economic perspectives.

The design recognizes that it cannot accomodate all of the complex ramifications of ethnicity and still accomplish its primary purpose; simplifying the teaching of abstract ideas. Therefore, it is understood that differing levels of assimilation and/or retention of original culture exist within the same ethnic group. The design must also assume certain common elements of original culture for an ethnic group. This assumption cannot accomodate intra-group differences particularly for ethnic groups originating from large geographical areas.

It should also be noted that ethnic groups can develop cultural characteristics that are not derived from their original culture nor borrowed from the society to which they immigrated.

The significance of an ethnic group's original culture has been noted by Banks and Gay. They state that, "The new cultures which emerge undoubtedly have some remnants from their original motherlands, but not necessarily in their original form. Rather, the need to adapt to new surroundings and the effects of cultural sharing give rise to new forms."[5] Any teaching strategy attempting to relate this adaptive process to students must be predicated on a thorough understanding of an ethnic group's original culture.

If schools in this nation are to continue to move toward the goal of a more pluralistic curriculum, students must be able to gain a conceptual understanding of ethnicity. Authors such as Garcia suggest that another possible benefit may be that ethnocentrism is lessened as students are exposed to a series of cross cultural experiences.[6]

The intergration of public schools must go beyond students and teachers and reach into the curricular realm.

[5] James A. Banks and Geneva Gay, "Ethnicity in Contemporary American Society: Toward the Development of a Typology," Ethnicity, Vol. 5, 1978, p. 242.

[6] Ricardo Garcia, Fostering a Pluralistic Society Through Multiethnic Education. Bloomington, Ind., Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1978, p. 31.

It would be ironic to present a heterogeneous student body with a monoethnic curriculum. Inclusion or exclusion from the curriculum of ethnic content carries with it connotations of legitimacy.

A multiethnic curriculum can provide more culturally diverse and enriching educational experiences for all students. It is hoped that the design described in these pages may contribute toward that end.

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